THE OLDER WE GET

"At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there." —JOHN 8:9

As the Law of Moses required a woman caught in the act of adultery be stoned along with the man, we have to wonder where was the man. Why was he not brought before Jesus?

The Pharisees were the authority in Israel and the majority of them were arrogant, self righteous men whose claim was to conform strictly to the Law of Moses. Over the years, Jewish society had devalued the role of women, and authorities re-interpreted the law to coincide with their own prejudices. Instead of the man, the Pharisees placed the onus for adulterous behaviour on the woman. Whether in Jewish circles or Christian circles, it is possible to say something is biblical often enough and to bandy it around as a kind of consensus that we end up assuming this is actually what Scripture says. But very often it is not. We have simply allowed our interpretation of Scripture to conform to our own prejudices.

When people meet Jesus, He unveils the truth about them. Rather than condemning the woman and stoning her, her accusers went away, the older ones first. This was not due to any form of repentance, but out of smugness and fear of being further exposed. We know this because the Pharisees and scribes were still trying to discredit Jesus, and setting traps in order to have Him arrested. But why did the older ones leave first?

Self righteousness is a far harder nut to crack than unrighteousness. The older we get, the more set in our ways we become. We either grow more kind, patient and understanding, or we grow more hardened, impatient and bitter, but we do not remain the same. In their efforts to keep the Law, the Pharisees had become self righteous and judgmental of others. Perhaps it was the names of the older Pharisees Jesus had written first in the dust. They are in greater need of forgiveness than the woman caught in adultery, and Jesus exposes that to them. As He continued to write on the ground, more of her accusers left until it was only the woman standing there. She knew her sin and did not defend herself. She stood humbly before Jesus and was forgiven.

The older we get, the more aware of our own sin we are, and it follows that our patience, kindness and compassion toward others should increase. God has absolutely nothing to offer when we stand before Him with a checklist of all the ways we have adhered to His laws, but He has everything to offer the one who comes humbly and says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

PRAYER: Keep me humbled, Lord, and help me to grow more compassionate and understanding toward others. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Do I harbour any prejudices that keep me from forgiving others?